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AUTHOR Moracco, John C.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine some effects that stress has on teachers and if there were differences between the stress experienced by regular classroom teachers and the stress experienced by special education teachers. Subjects were elementary and secondary school teachers. The survey instrument used was the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire. Responses provided information on teachers' perceptions of professional adequacy, interpersonal relationships, and job satisfaction. Results indicated that individual psychological characteristics influence the perception of stress. Individuals scoring high on perfectionist attitudes were inclined to anticipate stressful events before they happened and the anticipation produced psychological changes characteristic of actual stress. No difference was found between regular and special education teachers in their perception of stress. It is concluded that stress is largely an individually perceived phenomenon caused by personality traits and individual belief systems, rather than by purely environmental or occupational factors. (JD)

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Stress in Teaching: A Comparison of Perceived Stress Between Special Education and Regular Teachers

John C. Moracco
Pam Gray
Raymond V. D'Arienzo

Auburn University

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Stress in Teaching: A Comparison of Perceived

Stress Between Special Education and Regular Teachers

Stress is a considerable problem among helping professionals. Teacher surveys have indicated that classroom professionals are leaving the teaching profession at an alarming rate. A conservative National Education Association estimate is that 30 percent of our nation's teachers would prefer to be doing something else (Bardo, 1979). The National Education Association also reported that 40 percent of today's teachers say they will leave teaching before retirement (Muse, 1980). NEA figures also reveal that in 1961, 28 percent of our nation's teachers had 20 or more years teaching experience. By 1976, only 14 percent had 10 or more years experience (Instructor, 1977).

Walsh (1979) reported that a Chicago teachers union survey reveals 56.6% of 5,500 responding teachers have claimed job related physical and/or mental illness. The problem of teacher stress has become so serious in Tacoma, Washington, a local teachers association has been successful in negotiating stress insurance for its members.

The effects of teacher stress are well documented and vary in severity from a loss or gain in appetite (Broder, 1979; Hendrickson, 1979) to total emotional breakdown (Hendrickson, 1979). Some of the more common physiological effects are cardiovascular system problems (Muse, 1980; Moracco & McFadden, 1980; Hendrickson, 1970; Broder, 1979; Berger, 1980, Bloch, 1977 and 1978); digestive system problems (Muse, 1980; Bloch, 1977, 1978; Berger, 1980; Hendrickson, 1979; Moracco & McFadden, 1980); immunological system problems (Muse, 1980; Berger, 1980); skeletal-muscular system problems (Muse, 1980; Bloch, 1977, 1978; Broder, 1979; Hendrickson, 1979; Moracco & McFadden, 1980); and circulatory

system problems (Muse, 1980; Bloch, 1977, 1978; Broder, 1979). In addition to the physiological effects of stress, teachers also experience psychological and behavioral effects (Moracco & McFadden, 1980). Some of the common psychological effects are anxiety, mental fatigue (Bloch, 1977, 1978; Berger, 1980; Moracco & McFadden, 1980); low self-esteem (Berger, 1980; Moracco & McFadden, 1980); and irritability (Bloch, 1977, 1978; Broder, 1979). Such behavioral effects as: inadequate work performance, absenteeism, and poor staff relations (Moracco & McFadden, 1980) are also experienced by stressed teachers.

One medical doctor and clinical professor (Bloch, 1977) has likened the effects of prolonged psychic stress of teachers to the survivors of war disasters suffering from combat neurosis. Physiologically, stress causes problems in the body's cardiovascular, digestive, immunological, and skeletal-muscular systems (Muse, 1980). Doctors have also linked stress with causing general anxiety and depression, addiction to alcohol and other drugs, breakdowns in relations with colleagues, friends, and family, low job productivity, absenteeism from the job, hospitalization, and ultimately premature death (Newell, 1979). Harlin (1976) states that most teacher absenteeism is due to mental health problems.

Despite the tremendous amounts of research and energies which have been devoted to the understanding of teacher stress, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) contend that research concerned with occupational stress among teachers is still in its infancy. They suggest the need for developing, "a clear definition and model of teacher stress," before research can be carried out "meaningfully" (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978, p. 1). Although,

consensus has not been reached, definitions of teacher stress have been postulated by a number of educational researchers.

Stress can be good (eustress) or bad (distress) (Selye, 1976). However, it is the unpleasant stress and its sometimes disasterous effects on educators which is the concern of this effort. The "Father of Stress Research," Selye, has defined stress in its simplest terms as being, "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand" (Selye, 1976, p. 472).

Moracco and McFadden have defined stress, "as an alteration of psychological homeostasis usually accompanied by physiological changes resulting from aspects of the teacher's job and meditated by the perception that the demands upon the teacher are threats to self-esteem or well-being, and by psychological coping mechanisms employed to maintain homeostasis" (Moracco & McFadden, 1980, p. 5).

Different models of teacher stress are discussed in the literature. The engineering model (Hinkle, 1974; Wield & Hanes, 1976) "defines stress in terms of the stimulus characteristics of the environment, and essentially conceptualizes stress as pressure exerted by the environment on an individual" (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978, p. 1). Clark (1980, pg. 17) reports that the physiological appears to be "more widely accepted among social scientists than the engineering model." Moracco and McFadden (1980) and Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) suggest that most models of stress are quite similar, "and in many cases one can be substituted for another by simply changing the nomenclature" (Moracco & McFadden, 1980, pp. 5-6).

The literature reveals many studies concerned with stress as experienced by classroom teachers, school administrators, and counselors. However, a perusal of the literature has indicated that virtually nothing has been written concerning stress and the special education teacher. It is the position in this paper that these professional educators, who daily have to cope with students who possess physical, emotional, and/or intellectual disabilities, experience more stress than other classroom teachers.

The model adopted for this study is from Moracco and McFadden's (1980) work. Essentially the model postulates that an event is stressful only if it is appraised as being a threat to self-esteem or well-being. The appraisal mechanism is mediated by the characteristics of an individual consisting of past experiences, personality traits, and belief systems.

Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not special education teachers experience more job related stress than regular classroom teachers as measured by a specific instrument--namely the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (Clark, 1980).

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between special education teachers' scores and other teachers' scores on the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire which identifies the occupational stress factors as perceived by teachers. Other hypotheses that were investigated were the degree of relationship of sex, teacher experience, and years of experience to perceived stress.

Method

Subjects and Setting

The school system where teacher perception of stress was surveyed was located in a Middle-Atlantic state. It is located in proximity to Washington, D. C.

The system is located in one of the most populus counties of the state; the county has an area of 486.17 square miles. The public school system is one of the largest in the country with a 1980 estimated enrollment of 120,955 students. There are 216 schools in the system including 144 elementaries, 40 junior highs, one middle school, 17 senior high schools, two high schools, two vocational education centers, and 10 special education centers. The school system is administratively divided into three areas, northern, central, and southern, with an assistant superintendent administering each.

The subjects included classroom teachers who taught in the county system and were in the Central Administrative Area. This specific area was selected because it represents the entire county. The principals of the Central Area's 13 junior high schools, four senior high schools, four special education centers, one middle school, one high school, one special education vocational school, and 24 of 48 elementary schools were advised of the study and its purposes. Because of the large number of elementary schools a random sample of 24 schools were selected.

Instrumentation

The Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (Clark, 1980, pp. 138-141) is a 30 item, five factor, data-gathering instrument devised and scaled to identify the perceived occupational stress factors of

teachers. The questionnaire's original 97 Likert-type stimulus items were factor analyzed according to the principal components method after its initial administration to 391 Georgia classroom teachers. "Both Kaiser's Varimax and oblique rotations were executed" (Clark, 1980, p. v) with the oblique solution proving to be, "the best linear fit of the data" (Clark, 1980, p. v). Five factors and 30 items (each loading at least $\pm$ .55) emerged.

A random sample of 400 Alabama teachers cross-validated the factored questionnaire on which a second factor analysis was completed. "Results of this analysis indicated job-induced stress as perceived by teachers in a multidimensional concept composed of five factors: (1) feelings of professional inadequacy, (2) principal-teacher professional relationships, (3) collegial relationships, (4) group instruction, and (5) job overload.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was computed to examine the internal consistency of the 5 factors. The internal consistency for: factor 1 was .937; factor 2 was .982; factor 3 was .958; factor 4 was .936; and factor 5 was .933 (Clark, 1980, p. 88). The high magnitudes of the internal consistency of the scales are readily visible.

Internal Consistency Coefficients
for Each of the 5 Factors

Factor	Internal Consistency
1 - Professional Inadequacy	.937
2 - Principal/Teacher Professional Relationships	.982
3 - Collegial Relationships	.958
4 - Group Instruction	.936
5 - Job Overload	.933

Procedures

Each building principal in the Central Administrative Area was contacted by the researcher to determine the best method to administer the instrument to his/her staff. Principals were encouraged to allow the researcher to meet with their staffs before or after regular school hours to complete the instrument. This was not feasible in all cases so principals distributed the instruments in some of the schools. The completed instruments were collected by the researcher. Some were mailed back to Auburn University. The scan sheets were read and punched on to computer cards. Most of the data were analyzed with a multiple regression technique. Descriptive statistics were used when appropriate.

Results

The total number of surveys sent out were 1335. From this number 675 were returned and were filled out adequately to be processed. The returns represented about 52% of the questionnaires distributed. The ages of the respondents were categorized into five divisions: 21-30 years (23.4%); 31-40 years (41%); 41-50 years (20.7%); 51-60 years (8.3%); and 60 or older (1.8%). The gender of the sample consisted of about 30% males and 70% females. This reflected the composition of the system on a county-wide basis. There were about 19% of the teachers who classified themselves as special education teachers.

A factor analysis was performed to validate Clark's (1980) five factors of the TOSFQ. The results revealed general support for most of the factors. However, the current study analysis did produce some rearrangement of items in factor composition. The new composition of factors appeared to be more internally consistent based on conceptual

considerations. The revised TOSFQ in the regression procedures was used employing the first five factors. (See Appendix for original and revised factors.)

The regression analyses used four predictors of perceived stress; obsessive-compulsive ideation (OC), Teacher Belief System (Belief), Special Education teacher (Sp. Ed.), and Sex (Sex). Table 1 indicates the results of the analysis for each of the five factors of the TOFSQ. From this table it is evident that obsessive-compulsive ideation (OC) and Teacher Belief Systems (Belief) were the main contributors to the relationship. Both of these variables were significant beyond the .001 level. Special education teacher classification and sex designation had little influence on the relationship for each of the five factors of the revised TOSFQ. The significant and nonsignificant variables were consistent across all five factors of the instrument.

Information was gathered to determine the effect that teacher stress may have on behavior. The teachers were asked if they missed any days of school. Those that responded in the affirmative were asked if stress were a factor in missed days. Forty-three percent of the teachers indicated that indeed stress was a factor. If stress were a factor in missed days, estimates of the influence stress had was assessed. About 25% of this group reported that stress accounted for more than 50% of the influence in missed days.

The last item on the questionnaire asked whether the respondent would become a teacher if she/he had to make that choice again. A majority (51%) of the teachers indicated that if they had it to do over again they would not be teachers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine some effects that stress has on teachers and if there were differences between regular classroom and special education teachers. To the extent that the results give clear evidence, certain information can be ascertained. For the four variables under consideration, it is apparent that psychological characteristics influence the perception of stress more than other individual characteristics. In the present study psychological characteristics include OC and Belief Systems. Other individual characteristics included special education classification and sex of teacher. This finding agrees with Lazarus (1966) and Burchfield (1979) in their position that appraisal is a very important consideration in understanding stress. Further support is lent to Burchfield's claim that stress is a psychological rather than a physiological process. The OC was designed to measure the degree of perfectionistic attitude held by individuals. Example of some items are: "If I don't set high standards for myself, I am likely to end up as a second-rate person" and "It is shameful for me to display weak or foolish behavior". Teachers who score high on this scale are thought to be compulsive worriers. Thus the "worrier" probably anticipates consequences of stressful events long before their happening. The anticipation produces physiological changes in him/her as though it were the actual stressor (Burchfield, 1979).

The Belief System scale was designed to measure compulsive behavior specific to teaching. Examples of items are: "Teachers must be consistent at all times" and "Teachers have no bias or prejudices: All students look alike to a good teacher". Similar to the OC it was expected that

individuals scoring high on this scale were predisposed to stress. This phenomenon was confirmed by the results of this study.

Other predictors were ineffective in contributing to perceived stress. Whether the teachers were male or female or special education or regular classroom teachers had no influence on the way they perceived stress in teaching.

These findings tell us that efforts to reduce teacher stress by environmental manipulation may not be effective. A large scale research supported by the National Institute of Education focuses on occupational stress found in the teaching environment. In effect NIE has funded research that may be on the wrong path. The findings in this study support the claim that it is more effective if we deal in personality or belief systems rather than occupational features. This is consistent with the notion that stress is largely an individually perceived phenomenon.

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Table 1

Regression Results Using Obsessive-Compulsive (OC), Belief Systems (Belief), Special Education (Sp. Ed.) and Sex as Predictor Variables

Factor One - Administrative Support

Variable	R	r	F
OC	.45753	.45753	113.078*
Belief	.47633	.30838	15.727*
Sp. Ed.	.47764	.04725	0.992
Sex	.477879	-.02823	0.964

Factor Two - Teacher Relations

OC	.46723	.46723	119.792*
Belief	.48599	.31349	16.243*
Sp. Ed.	.48734	-.02955	1.062
Sex	.48836	.04526	0.872

Factor Three - Working with Students

OC	.40088	.40088	83.148*
Belief	.41602	.26576	9.601*
Sp. Ed.	.42010	.06877	2.881
Sex	.42086	.02782	.519

Factor Four - Financial Security

OC	.35800	.35800	65.644*
Belief	.36773	.22340	5.466*
Sp. Ed.	.37036	.05321	1.489
Sex	.37038	-.00269	.014

Factor Five - Task Overload

OC	.47239	.47239	126.067*
Belief	.48946	.31052	14.165*
Sp. Ed.	.48964	.02524	.161
Sex	.48978	.01715	.121

APPENDIX

TOSFQ FACTORS

FACTOR ONE - Feeling of Professional Inadequacy

1. Try to motivate students who do not want to learn
2. Feeling my salary is not equal to my duties and responsibilities
9. Feeling too many parents are indifferent about school problems
14. Working for an inadequate salary
19. Feeling that a few difficult to discipline students take too much of my time away from the other students
25. Feeling that there is a lack of parental involvement in solving school discipline problems
28. Feeling my job does not provide the financial security I need

FACTOR TWO - Principal-Teacher Professional Relationships

3. Feeling there is a lack of administrative support for teachers in my school
7. Feeling my principal lacks insight into classroom problems
10. Feeling my opinions are not valued by my principal
15. Feeling my principal gives one too little authority to carry out the responsibilities assigned to me
17. Feeling there is lack of recognition for good teaching in my school
20. Feeling I cannot tell my principal in an open way how I feel about school related matters
26. Feeling my principal is too aloof and detached from the classroom

FACTOR THREE - Collegial Relationships

4. Working in a school where there is an atmosphere of conflict among teachers
8. Feeling some teachers in my school are incompetent
11. Feeling there is competition among teachers in my school rather than a team spirit of cooperation
18. Feeling poor teacher/teacher relationships exist in my school

TOSFQ FACTORS (Cont'd)

23. Having a few teachers in my school who do not carry their share of the load

27. Feeling that cliques exist among teachers in my school

30. Feeling that poor communication exist among teachers in my school

FACTOR FOUR - Group Instruction

5. Having students in my class/classes who talk constantly

12. Having to tell my students the same things over and over

16. Planning and organizing learning activities for wide ability ranges

21. Feeling my students do not adequately respond to my teaching

24. Feeling I do not have adequate control of my students

FACTOR FIVE - Job Overload

6. Having to do school work at home to meet what is expected of me

13. Having insufficient opportunity for rest and preparation during the school day

22. Having too little clerical help

29. Feeling I never catch up with my work

TOSFQ FACTORS - REVISED

FACTOR ONE - Administrative Support

3. Feeling there is a lack of administrative support for teachers in my school

7. Feeling my principal lacks insight into classroom problems

10. Feeling my opinions are not valued by my principal

15. Feeling my principal gives me too little authority to carry out the responsibilities assigned to me

17. Feeling there is a lack of recognition for good teaching in my school

20. Feeling I cannot tell my principal in an open way how I feel about many school related matters

26. Feeling my principal is too aloof and detached from the classroom

FACTOR TWO - Relationships with Teachers

4. Working in a school where there is an atmosphere of conflict among teachers

8. Feeling some teachers in my school are incompetent

11. Feeling there is competition among teachers in my school rather than a team spirit of cooperation

18. Feeling poor teacher/teacher relationships exist in my school

23. Having a few teachers in my school who do not carry their share of the load

27. Feeling that cliques exist among teachers in my school

30. Feeling that poor communication exist among teachers in my school

FACTOR THREE - Working with Students

1. Trying to motivate students who do not want to learn

5. Having students in my class/classes who talk constantly

9. Feeling too many parents are indifferent about school problems

12. Having to tell my students the same things over and over

19. Feeling that a few difficult to discipline students take too much of my time away from the other students

TOSFQ FACTORS - REVISED (Cont'd)

21. Feeling my students do not adequately respond to my teaching

24. Feeling I do not have adequate control of my students

25. Feeling there is a lack of parental involvement in solving school discipline problems

FACTOR FOUR - Financial Security

2. Feeling my salary is not equal to my duties and responsibilities

14. Working in a school where there is an atmosphere of conflict among teachers

28. Feeling my job does not provide the financial security I need

FACTOR FIVE - Task Overload

6. Having to do school work at home to meet what is expected of me

13. Having insufficient opportunity for rest and preparation during the school day

16. Planning and organizing learning activities for wide ability ranges

22. Having too little clerical help

29. Feeling I never catch up with my work